

Parentline

2010 OVERVIEW



BoysTown

Support, counselling and parent education for the cost of a local call

Parentline

2010 Overview

Parentline counsellors are able to talk with you about your family and any parenting challenges.

We can assist you to:

- * Understand the way your family works
- * Believe in your own skills and strengths
- * Change how things are done in a way that suits your family
- * Access information on services and resources in your local community
- * Increase your parenting skills through over-the-phone training

Parentline 1300 30 1300

www.parentline.com.au

Parentline provides education, guidance and support for parents and other individuals who care for children in Queensland and the Northern Territory.



Parentline is a joint initiative of:



The service operates between 8am-10pm, seven days a week for the cost of a local call.

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Introduction

Parentline is a confidential telephone counselling service providing professional counselling and support for parents and carers of children and young people. The service commenced in Queensland in April 1996 and extended to the Northern Territory in May 2004. Parentline receives funding from both the Queensland Department of Education and Training (Office for Early Childhood Education and Care) and the Northern Territory Department of Health and Families.

The service operates between 8am and 10pm, seven days a week for the cost of a local call.* Counsellors respond to approximately 185 calls each week concerning a range of issues such as parenting strategies for challenging behaviours, parent-child relationships, custody and access, and the emotional well-being of children and young people. During 2010, Parentline enhanced its ability to offer support to parents and carers online, with 111 email and 33 real-time web counselling sessions provided during the year.

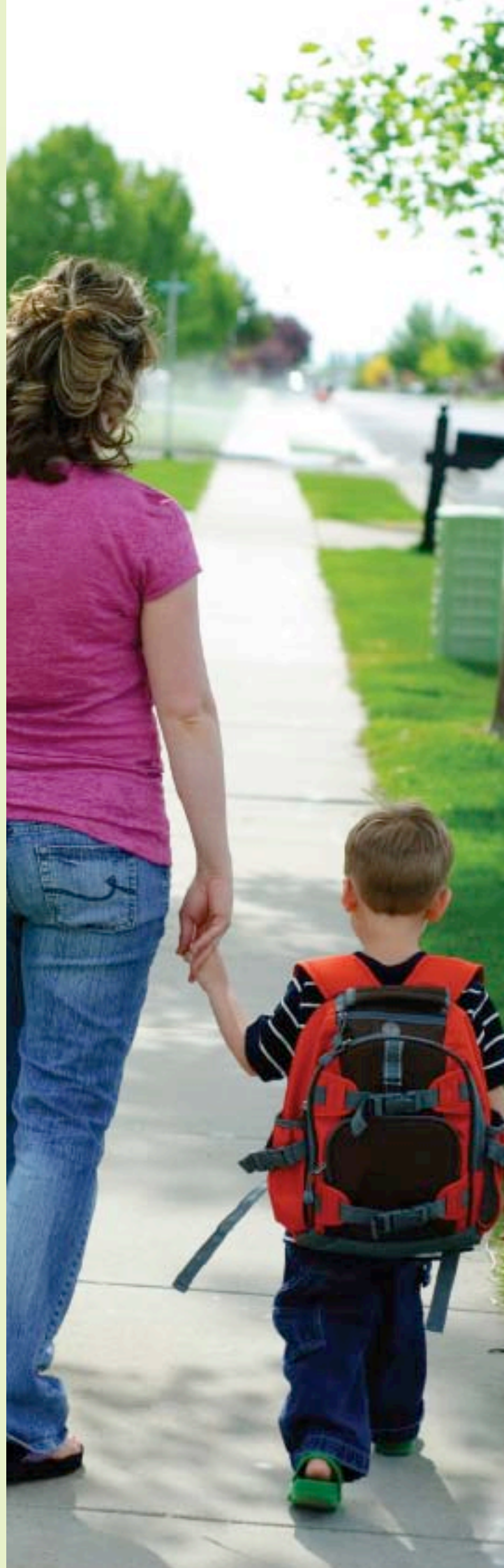
Parents, carers and family members have direct access to counsellors and can choose to speak with either a male or female counsellor. They are also able to arrange to call back and speak with the same counsellor to work through their issues.

Parentline provides a mix of assistance through counselling, information and referral that is tailored to meet individual client needs. Parentline assists callers to:

- ✿ Obtain a better understanding of the way their family works
- ✿ Believe in themselves and their own skills and strengths
- ✿ Reflect on and develop strategies for changing how things are done in their family in a way that suits their individual family's needs
- ✿ Identify their information needs - counsellors can provide callers with relevant tip sheets regarding more than 100 topics
- ✿ Access over-the-phone training through the Positive Parenting Programs (Triple P) developed by the University of Queensland. Triple P may be delivered through a series of phone sessions and can be supported by a workbook and information sheets.

Parentline focuses on the parenting relationship, of which there are three main dimensions:

- ✿ Concerns in relation to the child (parenting strategies and skills related to behaviour management or concerns for the child's emotional well-being)
- ✿ Relationship concerns (relationship with children or relationship between parents/carers)
- ✿ Concerns in relation to the caller's role as a parent or carer.



Summary and Highlights

Queensland and Northern Territory parents, carers and family members sought help from Parentline at high rates during 2010, with 14,164 attempts to reach the telephone counselling service.

Counsellors responded to 65% of these calls.

In addition, counsellors made 475 calls to parents and carers, responded to 111 emails and engaged in 33 web counselling sessions. In total, Parentline counsellors engaged in 9,759 sessions, providing counselling, support, information and/or referral services across telephone, email and web.

Of the 9,759 Parentline sessions, 9,162 were with Queensland residents and 486 sessions were with clients from the Northern Territory.

The objective of this 2010 Overview is to detail the diversity of Parentline clients, their main concerns and the nature of those concerns.

Parentline has continued to be successful in reaching a diverse range of clients including custodial and non-custodial parents, grandparents, two-parent and blended families, single-parents, extended family members, first-time and ongoing callers and clients in regional areas. In fact, Parentline saw an increase in contacts from parents and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and an increase in contacts from grandparents during 2010.

The profile of main problems concerning callers has remained consistent over the 15 years of Parentline operations. These relate to problems with children's challenging behaviour, parenting strategies, enhancing relationships, mental and emotional wellbeing, infant care, custody or family law issues and child abuse.

Although there are no clear emerging issues or trends in the help-seeking behaviour of parents and carers, Parentline has noted significant increases during 2010 in the number of contacts about challenging behaviour of children, child abuse, contact and access issues and concerns about children's mental health and/or emotional wellbeing compared with 2009. Additionally, there were decreases in the number of contacts about parent-child relationships; infant care and development; and concerns related to children's relationships with others (outside their family).

Men, grandparents, single parents, non-custodial parents and those callers receiving ongoing support from Parentline sought help at different rates on a number of issues to the average Parentline caller.

- ❁ Men were significantly more likely than women to seek help from Parentline about relationships between parents, family law issues, contact and access issues, and children running away or leaving home
- ❁ Grandparents were significantly more likely than parents to seek help about child abuse concerns, children's mental health and/or emotional wellbeing and issues related to contact, access and family law
- ❁ Single-parent families were significantly more likely than two-parent families to seek help about family law, contact and access, and relationships between parents
- ❁ Non-custodial parents were significantly more likely to seek help about parent-child relationships, parent relationships with others, contact and access issues, family law, and also about their own mental and emotional wellbeing (when compared with parents who have custody or shared custody)
- ❁ Clients engaging in ongoing or intensive counselling support were significantly more likely than first-time and occasional clients to seek help about their own mental and emotional wellbeing, parenting strategies, family law issues, parent relationships with others and issues related to their parenting role or self-concept.

Parents' concerns often changed with the age of their children. For instance, help-seeking about parenting strategies and relationships between parents was significantly more prominent for families with children aged up to 9 years. Concerns about contact, access and family law issues were predominant issues for parents of children under the age of 15 years. Concerns about behaviours and discipline are most prominent for families with children aged between 10 and 18 years. As children get older, there is an increase in the concerns about parent-child relationships.

Of the total 9,759 telephone, web and email interactions during 2010, Parentline counsellors recorded detailed information for 9,402 of these sessions. The remainder of this Overview is based upon counsellor's reports on these 9,402 interactions with parents and carers across Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Expanding Into Online Support

In September 2010, we launched a new Parentline website to offer greater support to parents and carers. The new site provides 24/7 access to a range of parenting information and tip sheets, with new material added monthly. It has proved popular, with 6,145 visits from 5,235 visitors in the last quarter of the year.

We commenced email and web counselling, offering parents two new ways to seek help and support. The new counselling modalities began in late 2010 and provide those parents who do not feel comfortable speaking with someone over the phone an alternative method of help-seeking.

Web counselling allows parents to communicate one-on-one, in real time with a counsellor. It is offered between 11am and 2pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Parents are also able to email a message, query or request to counsellors. Email counselling often works for those clients who need to take longer to compose their message or express their thoughts and feelings. It also benefits individuals who feel confronted by phone and web counselling.



Who Contacted Parentline?

Age, Gender and Cultural Background of Callers

Parentline clients ranged in age from teenagers to 82 year olds, with 92% aged 21 to 59 years. The average age was 40 years.

Females made up 86% of contacts, with males comprising the remaining 14%. This is consistent with the tendency for mothers to take a primary caring role for children in our community and consistent with male help-seeking tendencies in general, especially in terms of access to counselling services.

The cultural background of callers to Parentline is provided in Table 1. The data shows that 10%+ of sessions were with parents and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, while 1.7% of sessions were with Indigenous parents and carers.

Table 1 Cultural background of callers to Parentline

Cultural background	Proportion* 2010 (n =6,264)
Indigenous	1.7%
CALD	9.9%
Others	88.4%
Total	100%

* Proportions based on numbers of sessions where the cultural background of client was known

+ Figures in the report are rounded to enhance the readability of the report



During 2010, Parentline saw an increase in contacts from parents and carers from CALD backgrounds.

Given that the background of clients was recorded in 67% of calls, the following figures are likely to be an under-representation of the actual number of counselling sessions provided to Indigenous and culturally diverse clients:

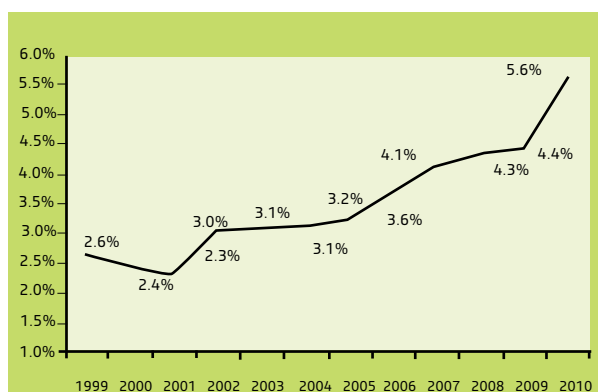
- ✿ 106 Parentline sessions (1.7%) were with Indigenous parents and carers, consistent with 2009 figures
- ✿ 622 Parentline sessions (10%) were from clients of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: a 21% increase in the absolute number of sessions with clients from CALD backgrounds compared with 2009 figures.

Are Callers Parents, Carers or Other Family Members?

The majority (71%) of Parentline clients in 2010 were custodial parents. A further 9% were parents with shared custody and 8% were non-custodial parents. These proportions have been mostly consistent since Parentline began.

Contacts from grandparents accounted for almost 6% of sessions, of which 26% had full or shared custody of their grandchildren. Continuing a 10-year trend, the number and proportion of contacts from grandparents increased during 2010 (406 contacts from grandparents) as compared with the previous year (341 contacts from grandparents during 2009).

Figure 1 Contacts from Grandparents



Parentline also received a small number of contacts (6%) from foster carers, other relatives, family friends, neighbours and professionals involved with children (eg. teachers and social workers).

Diversity of Family Structures

Clients who contacted Parentline were mostly from single parent (44%) or two-biological parent families (38%). A smaller proportion of clients were from two-parent blended families (15%). The remaining 3% of callers were extended family members or had another relationship to the family. This proportional spread across different family structures has remained consistent across the 14 years of Parentline’s operation.

Most families had one (40%), two (32%) or three (17%) children. However, having four or more children was not uncommon (11%). **During 2010, the almost 10,000 interactions with parents and carers about families saw Parentline counsellors provide a service that impacted on approximately 19,500 children throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory.**

Most Parentline clients (75%) phoned with concerns about a child – 51% regarding a female child and 49% concerning a male child. Ages ranged from newborn babies up to adult children. Table 2 below demonstrates the spread across age ranges.

Table 2 Age of client’s children

Age	Proportion of Contacts (n = 6,831)
0-4 years	26.3%
5-9 years	18.1%
10-14 years	26.6%
15-18 years	22.6%
Adult Offspring	6.4%
Total	100%

Where Did They Phone From?

Ninety-four percent of sessions with Parentline counsellors during 2010 (9,759 contacts) were with Queensland residents, and 5% with Northern Territory residents (486 contacts). The remaining 1% of sessions were from other states - New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia.

All Parentline calls, emails and web counselling sessions are directed to BoysTown’s counselling centre in Brisbane. Of contacts from Queensland, 74% were from the South East region. Additionally, 72% of Northern Territory contacts were from Darwin or its satellite city of Palmerston. The remaining contacts were received from regional areas (see Table 3).

Table 3 Geographic location of contacts

QUEENSLAND	(n = 4,528)
Brisbane	45.6%
Gold Coast Region	8.3%
Sunshine Coast Region	7.1%
Rockhampton Region	7.0%
Toowoomba Region	6.6%
Ipswich Region	6.4%
Cairns Region	5.8%
North Coast Region	5.7%
Townsville Region	4.7%
Mackay Region	2.5%
Mt Isa Region	<1%

NORTHERN TERRITORY	(n = 203)
Darwin	59.1%
Alice Springs Region	16.8%
Palmerston	12.8%
Katherine Region	4.9%
Top End Region	4.4%
Tennant Creek	1.5%
Barkly Region	0.5%

Note: the geographic location was not recorded for all contacts

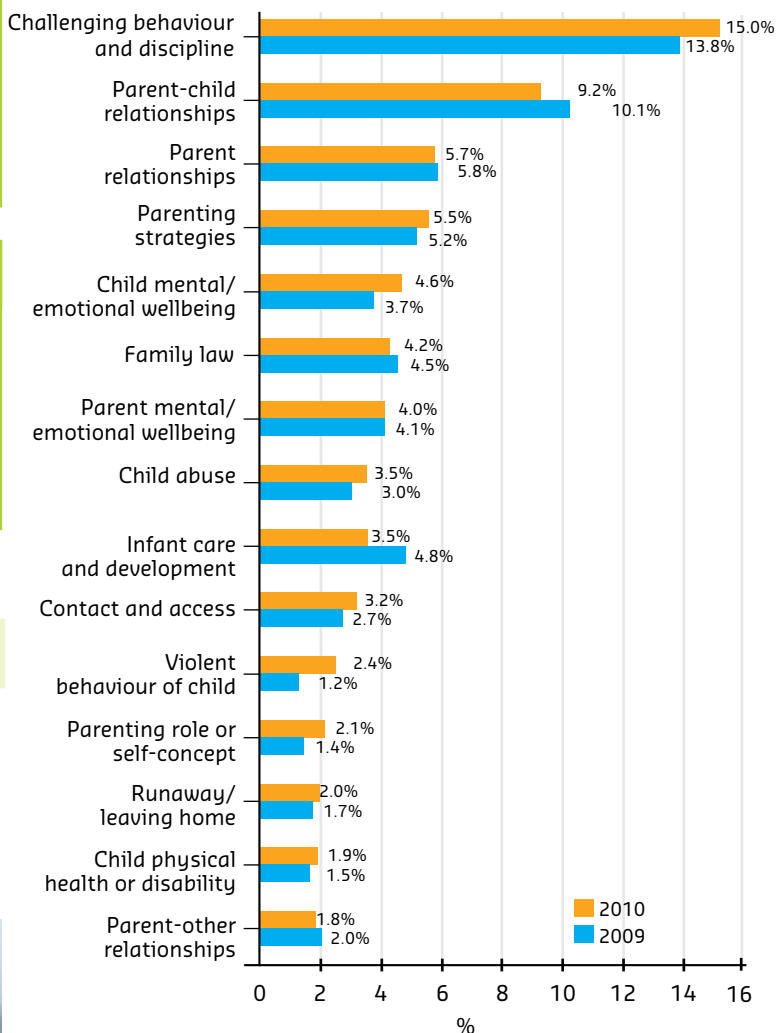
Main Concerns

Parentline counsellors spent an average of 29 minutes with clients in telephone and online counselling sessions, with the duration of sessions ranging from one minute to more than one and a half hours, depending on the clients' needs.



The 15 most frequent concerns for parents, carers and family members who contacted Parentline in 2010 are shown in Figure 2, along with comparison data for 2009.

Figure 2: Main Concerns 2010



The top concerns faced by callers to Parentline have remained mostly consistent since the service began in 1996. In summary, the major concerns of parents and carers are related to:

- ✿ Challenging behaviour and discipline
- ✿ Enhancing parent-child relationships
- ✿ Relationships between parents
- ✿ Parenting strategies
- ✿ Caring for infants
- ✿ Custody, access or family law issues
- ✿ The mental and emotional well-being of children and parents
- ✿ Concerns about child abuse

During the year, help-seeking rates increased for some issues and decreased for others compared with 2009. However, there are no consistent upward or downward trends emerging in terms of the concerns presented by Queensland and Northern Territory parents and carers over recent years.

The help-seeking changes noted during 2010 consist of:

- ✿ The number and proportion of contacts about managing children's challenging behaviour increased significantly compared with 2009 rates
- ✿ Although continuing to be the second most frequent concern for parents and carers, the number and proportion of contacts about parent-child relationships decreased, accounting for 9.2% of all sessions as compared with 10.1% of all sessions during 2009
- ✿ Relationships between parents and seeking assistance with parenting strategies continued to be two of the main reasons for contacting Parentline, ranking as the third and fourth most common concerns
- ✿ The number of contacts from parents and carers with concerns about children's mental health and/or emotional wellbeing increased significantly compared with the previous year
- ✿ The number of contacts about child abuse concerns increased significantly compared with the previous two years. However, 2010 rates were similar to help-seeking about child abuse concerns between 2005 and 2007
- ✿ There was an increase in the number and proportion of contacts from parents and carers about contact and access issues. However, 2010 rates were similar to help-seeking about this issue in 2006
- ✿ There was a rise in number and proportion of contacts from parents and carers concerned about violent behaviour of children and parenting role and/or parent self-concept concerns
- ✿ The number and proportion of contacts declined in relation to infant care and development concerns, and concerns about children's relationships with others (outside family - not parents or siblings).

*For trends analysis refer to Table 4 on page 8



Table 4 Problem type yearly trends - proportion of Parentline contacts by year

PRIMARY CONCERN	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	22.1%	24.1%	21.1%	22.2%	20.0%	18.1%
Child-other relationships	2.0%	1.8%	1.7%	1.9%	1.8%	1.3%
Parent-child relationships	10.4%	11.4%	10.8%	11.5%	10.1%	9.2%
Parent-other relationships	2.4%	2.8%	2.4%	2.2%	2.0%	1.8%
Parent relationships	7.0%	7.6%	5.7%	6.3%	5.8%	5.7%
Sibling relationships	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%
BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT	21.8%	22.8%	21.8%	21.0%	20.6%	22.5%
Challenging behaviour/discipline	11.8%	12.7%	11.8%	11.6%	13.8%	15.0%
Parenting strategies	8.1%	7.8%	7.9%	7.0%	5.2%	5.5%
Child runaway and/or left home	2.0%	2.3%	2.2%	2.3%	1.7%	2.0%
RESIDENCE/CONTACT	6.7%	6.8%	6.7%	6.0%	7.1%	7.5%
Contact and access	3.7%	3.4%	2.7%	2.8%	2.7%	3.2%
Family law	3.0%	3.5%	4.0%	3.2%	4.5%	4.2%
HEALTH/WELLBEING OF CHILD	7.9%	6.8%	7.3%	6.3%	6.1%	7.4%
ADD/ADHD	1.1%	0.9%	1.1%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%
Mental and/or emotional health of a child	4.7%	3.9%	4.2%	3.9%	3.7%	4.6%
Child physical health or disability	1.6%	1.6%	1.5%	1.3%	1.5%	1.9%
Risk-taking or suicidal behaviours of child	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%
HEALTH/WELLBEING OF PARENT	7.8%	7.9%	6.9%	7.0%	6.5%	6.6%
Parent physical health or disability	0.7%	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%	0.8%	0.4%
Mental and/or emotional health of a parent	4.2%	4.7%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.0%
Parenting role/self concept	2.7%	2.5%	2.0%	2.1%	1.4%	2.1%
Suicide-related issues of parent/significant other	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
POST NATAL	4.2%	4.5%	5.5%	6.4%	5.3%	3.9%
Infant care and development	3.7%	4.0%	5.0%	5.8%	4.8%	3.5%
Post natal adjustment	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%
CHILD ABUSE	2.8%	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	3.0%	3.5%
Emotional abuse	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Neglect of a child	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%
Physical abuse	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%
Sexual abuse	1.3%	1.5%	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%	1.8%
VIOLENCE	2.4%	2.6%	2.1%	2.7%	2.4%	3.2%
Domestic violence	0.7%	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	0.7%
Physical/sexual violence	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%
Violent behaviour of child	1.5%	1.4%	1.0%	1.6%	1.2%	2.4%
SCHOOL RELATED	2.9%	2.7%	2.7%	2.4%	2.7%	2.4%
School authority	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%
Bullying	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.7%	0.9%	0.8%
School adjustment	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%
Learning/study	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%
SEXUALITY	1.8%	1.8%	2.0%	2.0%	1.7%	1.9%
Sexual behaviour	1.4%	1.4%	1.7%	1.6%	1.3%	1.5%
Sexual orientation	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Pregnancy	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%
DRUG & ALCOHOL USE	2.0%	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.7%	1.9%
Child drug or alcohol use	1.8%	1.5%	1.3%	1.2%	1.4%	1.6%
Drug or alcohol use of a family member	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
PRACTICAL ISSUES	1.7%	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%
Child care	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Employment/financial	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.7%	0.4%
Legal/juvenile justice	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.6%
OTHER CALLS	15.8%	13.7%	17.8%	18.3%	21.5%	19.7%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

'Other Calls' mostly refers to contacts where parents and carers are seeking information about the Parentline service. We believe this is important since forming a relationship with the service may lead parents to seek help from Parentline in the future. 'Other calls' also include occasions where parents and carers are seeking information about other service providers and providing feedback about the Parentline service.

Challenging Behaviour and Discipline

After 14 years of operation, the number one reason parents and carers contacted Parentline remained concerns about managing children's challenging behaviour. Notably during 2010, the number of contacts about this issue increased significantly compared with the previous year, now accounting for 15% of all contacts to the service. It represents concerns about responding to children's behaviours and seeking help with discipline. This includes parents' perception of challenging, disruptive or offensive behaviours ranging from temper tantrums, head banging, inappropriate attention-seeking, deliberate rule-breaking and/or disobedience. Table 5 shows the nature of the 1,412 contacts.

Table 5 Challenging Behaviours and Discipline

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=1,412)
Seeking information	6%
Intermittent behaviour/discipline problems	23%
Ongoing behaviour/discipline problems	46%
Significant distress and/or severe problem behaviour	17%
Not coping and in need of referral/support	8%
Total	100%

Concerns about children's behaviour and discipline were most prominent for families with children aged 10 to 18 years (62% of all contacts were about this issue). Callers were most likely to be custodial parents (83% compared with 71% across all problem types), and parents from two parent families (60% compared with 53% across all problem types). The vast majority of callers seeking assistance with managing challenging behaviour of children were first-time (69%) or occasional (24%) clients to the Parentline service.

One mum's story

Mandy*, mother of four children in a blended family, had contacted Parentline many times over a number of years. Often these calls would focus on the relationship she has with her stepson, her feelings of anger and how she copes as a parent. She also worked with her counsellor on developing parenting strategies for situations that she found challenging, such as when the children fight.

The counsellor was able to act as a sounding board for Mandy, and help her reflect on what it might be like from her stepson's perspective. Her counsellor also encouraged her to express her feelings and then talked about different strategies for managing anger and other emotions.

When asked about the assistance that Parentline had given, particularly if it had an impact on herself, her parenting and her family, Mandy said:

"We lived in chaos. Parentline helped me to formulate workable things between myself and my husband. I was a smacking person and he wasn't. We now have a workable plan that we are both happy with. In combination with an anger management plan, I don't scream as much, I don't smack anymore, and I now use time out instead. My best friend has noticed a change in me. The children appear more positive, the girls are happier ... they still fight but less often."

*Names and details changed for privacy reasons



Parent-Child Relationships

The number of parents with concerns about the relationships between themselves (as parent or as prime carer) and their children was the second most common reason for contacting Parentline in 2010. Issues such as communication difficulties, arguments and interpersonal conflict continued to be common themes. This category also includes concern about the relationship between a child and the client's partner/ex-partner. Table 6 shows the details of the 866 contacts about parent-child relationships.

Table 6 Parent-Child Relationships

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=866)
Seeking information	9%
Occasional problems with communication	14%
Ongoing problems with communication	32%
Conflict causing major concern	30%
Severely distressed with the situation	15%
Total	100%

The number of contacts from parents focused on their relationship with their children increased as children grew older, with 55% of these concerns in 2010 about children older than 14 years. Additionally, parent-child relationship concerns were the most common concern for non-custodial parents and were predominantly presented by first-time (63%) or occasional clients (24%).

Parent Relationships

Parent relationship concerns include problems between the caller and their partner and/or ex-partner. Table 7 shows the nature of the 532 contacts.

Table 7 Parent Relationships

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=532)
Awareness of relationship problems	11%
Conflict over children/parenting strategies	18%
Concern about the effect of relationship problems on family	12%
Significant relationship difficulties causing distress	17%
Relationship breakdown/separation/divorce	42%
Total	100%

Help-seeking about relationships between parents was significantly more prominent for families with younger children, with 65% of contacts during 2010 from families with children younger than 10 years.

One mum's story

Mum of three young children, Alison* called Parentline just once, speaking with the counsellor for nearly an hour. She had rung because she was feeling unsure about the way she was parenting and managing her children, particularly her son who was exceptionally bright.

The counsellor spent a lot of time listening, talking with Alison about her situation, and understanding what was happening for her and her family. The counsellor gave a lot of reinforcement and reassurance about her parenting style, as well as a number of new ideas. Alison's questions were answered in a way that was tailored to her situation and which gave her some things to think about. The counsellor also gave her name and invited Alison to call her back.

When asked about two weeks later about the assistance that Parentline had given her and the impact on her self and her parenting from just that one call, Alison said:

I came off the phone feeling much better than when I rang, the counsellor gave me lots of praise, gave me the feeling that I was still in charge of things, helped me relate a bit better to the children, calmed me down, gave me peace of mind and gave me other things to try. I felt like she really cared.

After the call, I put a lot of things into practice. I had previously been screaming at my children all the time. Parentline helped me calm down, to know I am not a bad mother. I spoke with my children, and I changed the way I was responding to my son. I am now more happy, calm, and more open.

My husband is not yelling now, and he has been working with me instead of against me. Our children have been calmer too and they have not been playing up as much.

*Names and details changed for privacy reasons

Additionally, males, single parents and parents with shared custody were proportionally more likely to seek help about parent relationships than females, two-parent families, custodial parents and non-custodial parents. Of the contacts for which relationships between parents was the client's primary concern:

- ☼ Males made 24% (compared with 14% across all Parentline sessions)
- ☼ Single-parent callers made 55% (compared with 44% across all sessions), and
- ☼ Parents with shared-custody made 17% (compared with 9% of all sessions).

Parenting Strategies

These concerns are in relation to the client's need to explore parenting strategies and disciplinary techniques. Table 8 shows the nature of the 518 contacts.

Table 8 Parenting Strategies

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=518)
Seeking information	23%
Unsure about own strategies	26%
Managing, but seeking new strategies	33%
Major difficulties, current strategies not working	17%
Severe distress, not coping	1%
Total	100%

Parenting strategy concerns were most likely to be raised by parents and carers regarding children aged up to 9 years, with 62% of contacts in relation to this age group. Ongoing clients also made proportionally more contacts about parenting strategies (24% of these contacts) compared with their help-seeking across other problem types (19%).

Mental and/or Emotional Health of Child

The number of contacts from parents and carers with concerns about children's mental health and/or emotional wellbeing increased significantly during 2010 compared with the previous year. These concerns included changes in the child's behaviour, ways of interacting with others or related to issues such as grief, loneliness, eating disorders, psychosis, depression and/or anxiety symptoms. Table 9 shows the nature of the 434 contacts.

Table 9 Mental and/or Emotional Health of Child

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=434)
Enquiry about child's mental/emotional state	22%
Concern over recent change in child's behaviour	16%
Concern for child with ongoing mental/emotional problems	42%
Difficulties coping with mentally/emotionally ill child	15%
Severe distress, requires urgent intervention/referral	5%
Total	100%

Concerns about children's mental health or emotional well-being tended to be evenly spread across children of all ages between 6 and 18 years, with 80% of contacts in relation to children older than 5 years. These issues were predominantly presented by custodial parents (74%) and first-time or occasional clients (95%). Grandparents also made proportionally more contacts about the mental and emotional wellbeing of a child (8% of these contacts) compared with their help-seeking across other problem types (6%).

Family Law

Family law concerns include any family law matters, the process or outcomes of family court action or other issues related to family court decisions. Table 10 shows the nature of the 398 family law related contacts.



One father's story

Randal*, a single dad with shared custody of his teenage son, contacted Parentline on one occasion to gain some assistance with his parenting strategies and ways of relating to his son.

Through listening, understanding and letting Randal express how he was feeling, the counsellor created space for him to reflect on how he had been interacting with his son. The counsellor was able to acknowledge and be supportive of many parenting strategies and ways of interacting that he was already doing. In addition, the counsellor was able to give specific knowledge about normal child development for his son's age and assist Randal to understand his son's needs and point of view. Randal and the counsellor were then able to discuss other strategies and suggestions.

When asked two weeks later about the assistance that Parentline had given him and the impact on his family from just that one call, Randal said:

I was very happy to find someone to speak to who knew what they were talking about. It was very useful in pointing me in the right direction. I am now able to think of things in a different way. It allowed me to become conscious of development that I was not aware of or that I had forgotten about. I implemented a couple of strategies that made a difference for the boy. I was calm with him and was able to show him that I want to support him. It is not that radical ... it was just fine-tuning ... but my son has noticed. Our relationship has improved – he seems a little bit less rushed and impatient, and will talk a little bit more to me. It has helped me too - I realised that I need to be that calm with everybody. I have been able to focus better being calm when speaking to his mother, which has improved this relationship too.

*Names and details changed for privacy reasons

Table 10 Contacts Relating to Family Law

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=398)
Enquiry about family law	31%
Concerned about the process or outcomes of mediation/counselling	13%
Difficulties with receiving or paying child support/maintenance	5%
Ongoing family law matters	37%
Unresolved, dissatisfied with court decision	14%
Total	100%

The majority of family law contacts were from single parents (73%), with this group significantly more likely to contact about these concerns (compared with 44% of all contacts from single parents). Males, non-custodial parents, grandparents, ongoing clients and parents concerned about children younger than 15 years also had a greater representation in family law concerns:

- ✿ 21% were males compared with 14% across all problems
- ✿ 11% were non-custodial parents compared with 8% across all problems
- ✿ 11% were grandparents compared with 6% of all contacts
- ✿ 34% were sessions with clients accessing ongoing support from Parentline compared with 19% across all concerns
- ✿ 94% were parents or carers concerned about children younger than 15 years, compared with 71% across all problems.



One mum's story

Sue*, a mother of four young children, contacted Parentline once and spoke with the counsellor for over two hours. She initially contacted because her 4 year-old was being aggressive and she was worried that her younger children were copying his behaviour. Her husband had been threatening to smack their children and she was considering leaving her partner because he smacked and would not work together to implement other strategies.

The counsellor initially helped Sue to calm down by listening and working to understand what was happening for her and her children. Working together to understand situations from the child's perspective, they discussed a number of alternative behavioural techniques and talked about adjusting the time out strategies that she was already putting into place to make them more effective.

Two weeks later, when asked about about the assistance Parentline had given her and the impact on her self and her parenting from just that one call, Sue said:

When I rang, I was a complete and utter mess. I was about to have a nervous breakdown. It was my last resort. The counsellor helped me calm down. I have been using one of the behavioural techniques she suggested and I have been giving each child quality time one-on-one. It has all had a really good outcome ... just from one phone call.

The children's behaviour is a lot better – they are a lot calmer, they are less aggressive towards each other, more settled and happier ... because I am a lot calmer. My mum and husband have noticed a big change in me – that I am a lot calmer. Before calling, I had had enough, I was getting depressed and moody and snappy and didn't really want to talk to anyone. I have not cried in the past week. No one else has understood before.

*Names and details changed for privacy reasons

Mental and/or Emotional Health of a Parent

This problem type relates to concerns about the mental health and/or emotional wellbeing of the client, another parent or carer. Table 11 shows the nature of the 373 contacts.

Table 11 Mental and/or Emotional Health of Parent

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=373)
Seeking information	9%
Dealing with issues from own childhood	6%
Coping but needing support or strategies	55%
Problem interferes with parenting	22%
Needs urgent intervention or referral	8%
Total	100%

The majority of contacts about a parent's mental health and/or emotional wellbeing were from females (91%) and most often with clients accessing ongoing counselling and support from Parentline (52%). In addition, non-custodial parents and parents with children younger than 5 years made a greater representation within concerns about mental and/or emotional wellbeing of a parent:

- ✿ 20% were non-custodial parents, compared with 8% across all concerns
- ✿ 53% were parents and carers of children aged between 0 and 4 years, compared with 26% across all concerns.

Child Abuse

The number of contacts about child abuse concerns increased significantly during 2010 compared with the previous two years. However, rates were similar to help-seeking about child abuse concerns in 2005-2007. Contacts to Parentline about child abuse issues in 2010 related to sexual abuse (51%), physical abuse (20%), neglect (17%) and emotional abuse (12%). Tables 12 and 13 show the nature of these 330 contacts.

Table 12 Sexual Abuse

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=170)
Enquiry or suspected abuse	40%
Unsure how to support abused child	41%
Concern for child currently at risk of abuse	12%
Distress over ongoing abuse	5%
Severe distress, urgent intervention/referral required	2%
Total	100%



Table 13 Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse or Neglect

Nature of Calls	% contacts (n=160)
Enquiry or suspected abuse	31%
Concern over evidence of physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect	36%
Concern about own behaviour in relation to physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect	5%
Concern about ongoing abuse	24%
Severe distress, urgent intervention/referral required	4%
Total	100%

Child abuse concerns mostly related to children younger than 10 years (70%), with 91% in regard to children younger than 15 years. These concerns were predominantly presented by first-time and occasional clients (86%). Grandparents also made proportionally more contacts about child abuse (15% of these contacts) compared with their help-seeking across other problem types (6%).

Infant Care and Development

Infant care and development concerns are the ninth most common reason for contacting Parentline, accounting for 4% of contacts to the service during 2010. The majority of infant care and development concerns related to feeding, sleeping, crying, toileting, growth and milestones in the first five years of life. Table 14 shows the nature of the 329 contacts.

Table 14 Infant Care and Development

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=329)
Enquiry	43%
Coping but seeking support	17%
Seeking new strategies	29%
Tiredness affecting parenting	8%
Not coping	3%
Total	100%



Clients seeking help about infant care and development were most likely to be first-time or occasional clients, female, and the custodial parent or carer:

- ✿ 97% were first-time or occasional clients, compared with 81% across all concerns
- ✿ 90% were female clients, compared with 86% overall
- ✿ 96% were custodial parents and/or carers, compared with 71% across all concerns

Contact and Access Issues

This problem type represents concerns about arrangements for contact or access with children, including difficulty agreeing on or maintaining access arrangements with other parents, family members, or a child protection agency. Table 15 shows the nature of these 305 contacts.

Table 15 Contact and Access Issues

Nature of Contacts	% contacts (n=305)
Seeking information	20%
No contact/access arrangements in place	14%
Occasional difficulties with access	12%
Ongoing difficulties	38%
Continual lack of contact	16%
Total	100%

Contact and access concerns in 2010 were most prominent for families with children younger than 15 years (93%). Fathers, single parents, non-custodial parents, and grandparents had a greater representation in concerns about contact and access:

- ✿ 25% were male (mostly fathers), compared with 14% across all concerns
- ✿ 66% were single parents, compared with 44% across all concerns
- ✿ 24% were non-custodial parents, compared with 8% across all concerns
- ✿ 12% were grandparents, compared with 6% across all contacts.

Concerns for Client Groups

Differences Between Genders

The top two concerns for both male and female callers to Parentline during 2010 were managing children's challenging behaviour; and parent-child relationships.

Males (mostly fathers) were proportionally more likely than females to seek help about relationships between parents, family law concerns, contact and access issues, and children running away or leaving home.

It is important to note, men were more likely (than women) to be experiencing shared parental custody or to have no custodial rights at all. Fifty-four percent of males reported being a custodial parent compared with 74% of females, 14% shared custody of their child versus 8% of females, and 21% reported a non-custodial relationship with their child compared with 6% of female clients.

Top 10 Concerns of Male Clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Parent relationships
4. Family law
5. Parenting strategies
6. Contact and access issues
7. Child abuse
8. Child mental/emotional health
9. Child runaway and/or left home
10. Infant care and development

Females were more likely than males to seek help about challenging behaviour and discipline, infant care and development as well as their own mental and emotional wellbeing.

Top 10 Concerns of Female Clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Parenting strategies
4. Parent relationships
5. Child mental/emotional health
6. Parent mental/emotional health
7. Family law
8. Infant care and development
9. Child abuse
10. Contact and access issues

Do Parent's Concerns Change as Children Age?

The issues about which individuals contact Parentline also differ according to the age of the child of concern:

- ✿ Concerns about behaviours and discipline were most prominent for families with children aged between 10 and 18 years. Parents of children in this age group were also more likely to contact about a runaway child or children leaving home than those with children of other ages
- ✿ As children get older, there was a significant increase in the concerns about parent-child relationships – it is the number one reason for contacting about children 19 years and older
- ✿ Help-seeking about parenting strategies and relationships between parents was significantly more prominent for families with younger children, aged up to 9 years
- ✿ Virtually all contacts about infant care and post-natal adjustment were from parents with children aged less than 5 years
- ✿ Contact and access issues and family law issues were most prominent for families with children younger than 15 years
- ✿ Help-seeking about a parent's mental or emotional well-being were significantly greater for families with children aged between 0 and 4 years
- ✿ Child mental and emotional wellbeing concerns were significantly greater for parents with children older than 5 years
- ✿ Child abuse concerns were significantly higher for parents calling about children aged up to 9 years
- ✿ Parents of older children (15 years and above) were significantly more likely to have concerns about a child's drug or alcohol use.



The Top 10 Concerns For Each Age Group

Children 0-4 Years

1. Infant care and development
2. Challenging behaviour and discipline
3. Parent relationships
4. Parenting strategies
5. Parent mental/emotional health
6. Family law
7. Child abuse
8. Contact and access issues
9. Parenting role/self-concept
10. Child physical health or disability

Children 5-9 Years

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parenting strategies
3. Parent relationships
4. Child abuse
5. Family law*
5. Child mental/emotional health*
7. Parent-child relationships
8. Contact and access issues
9. Parent mental/emotional health
10. Parenting role/self-concept

*These two issues ranked equal 5th

Children 10-14 Years

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Child mental/emotional health
4. Parent relationships
5. Parenting strategies
6. Family law
7. Violent behaviour of child
8. Child runaway and/or leaving home
9. Contact and access issues
10. Child abuse

Children 15-18 Years

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Child mental/emotional health
4. Child runaway/leaving home
5. Child drug/alcohol use
6. Violent behaviour of child
7. Parenting strategies
8. Parent relationships
9. Child-other relationships
10. Parent mental/emotional health

Adult Children

1. Parent-child relationships
2. Child mental/emotional health
3. Challenging behaviour and discipline
4. Child drug/alcohol use
5. Child physical health or disability
6. Violent behaviour of child *
6. Parent mental/emotional health*
8. Parenting role/self concept
9. Child-other relationships
10. Parent relationships

* These two issues ranked equal 6th

Are Single-Parent Concerns Different?

Single-parents were significantly more likely to seek help from Parentline about family law concerns, contact and access issues, and relationships between parents. The following list presents the top 10 concerns for single parents.

Top 10 Concerns of Single Parents

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Parent relationships
4. Family law
5. Contact and access issues
6. Parenting strategies
7. Parent mental/emotional health
8. Child mental/emotional health
9. Violent behaviour of a child
10. Child abuse

Are Grandparent's Concerns Different?

Grandparents were significantly more likely than parents or carers to seek help from Parentline about child abuse concerns, mental and emotional wellbeing of a child and issues related to contact and access and family law. The following list presents the top 10 concerns for grandparents:

Top 10 Concerns of Grandparents

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Child abuse
3. Parent-child relationships
4. Family law
5. Contact and access issues
6. Child mental/emotional health
7. Parenting strategies
8. Parent-other relationships
9. Child-other relationships
10. Child runaway and/or leaving home*
10. Violent behaviour of child*

* These two issues were ranked equal 10th

What are the Concerns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Clients?

During 2010, Parentline counsellors engaged in 106 counselling sessions with clients who identified themselves as Indigenous. The main issues presented by these clients were concerns about managing children's behaviour, relationships between parents, parent-child relationships, and concerns about children's mental health and/or emotional wellbeing. The following list presents the top 10 concerns for this group over a five-year period (2006-2010).

Top 10 Concerns of Indigenous Clients (2006-2010)

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Parent relationships
4. Parenting strategies
5. Contact and access issues
6. Child mental/emotional health
7. Violent behaviour of child
8. Child abuse
9. Parent mental/emotional health*
9. Parenting role/self-concept*

*These two issues were ranked equal 9th

What are the Concerns for Clients of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds?

During 2010, Parentline counsellors engaged in 622 counselling sessions with clients who identified as belonging to a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background. These callers were proportionally more likely to seek help about family law issues (when compared with all other clients). The following list presents the top 10 concerns for the CALD parents during 2010.

Top 10 Concerns of CALD Clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Family law
4. Parenting strategies
5. Parent relationships
6. Parent mental/emotional health
7. Infant care and development
8. Child mental/emotional health
9. Child abuse*
9. Parenting Role/self-concept*

* These two issues were ranked equal 9th

What are the Concerns for Non-Custodial Parents?

Non-custodial parents were significantly more likely to seek help from Parentline about parent-child relationships, contact and access issues, family law issues, parent mental or emotional health and parent relationships with others (when compared to custodial parents and those with shared custody). The following list presents the top 10 concerns for non-custodial parents.

Top 10 Concerns of Non-Custodial Parents

1. Parent child relationships
2. Parent mental/emotional health*
2. Contact and access issues*
4. Family law
5. Parenting strategies
6. Parent-other relationships
7. Challenging behaviour and discipline
8. Parent relationships
9. Child mental/emotional health
10. Child drug/alcohol use

* These two issues were ranked equal 2nd

Ongoing Counselling and Intensive Support

Over the past year, most counselling and support provided was with first-time clients (59%) and clients who contact Parentline occasionally (22%). However, a unique feature of the service is the ability to provide ongoing counselling and support and allow clients to reconnect with the same counsellor over a period of time. The remaining 19% of interactions were with clients engaged in ongoing counselling and intensive support with Parentline counsellors.

There were differences in the issues that parents sought help about once or twice and those issues that were likely to involve ongoing counselling support. First-time and occasional clients were significantly more likely than ongoing clients to seek help about challenging behaviour and discipline, parent-child relationships, infant care and development, child mental/emotional health, child abuse and violent behaviour of the child. The following list presents the top 10 concerns for first-time and occasional clients of Parentline.

Top 10 Concerns of First-Time and Occasional Clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Parent relationships
4. Child mental/emotional health
5. Parenting strategies
6. Infant care and development
7. Child abuse
8. Family law
9. Contact and access issues
10. Violent behaviour of child

Clients engaging in ongoing or intensive counselling support with Parentline were significantly more likely than first-time and occasional clients to be seeking help about their own mental and emotional well-being, family law issues, parenting strategies, parent relationships with others, and issues related to their parenting role or self-concept. The following list presents the top 10 concerns for clients engaging in ongoing or intensive counselling support.

Top 10 Concerns of Clients Engaging in Ongoing or Intensive Counselling Support

1. Parent mental/emotional health
2. Family law
3. Parenting strategies
4. Parent-child relationships
5. Parent relationships
6. Challenging behaviours and discipline
7. Parent role/self-concept
8. Parent-other relationships
9. Contact and access issues
10. Child abuse

Referral to Other Support Services

Parentline counsellors have access to an extensive database of support services. The database lists services for parents and children such as child health services, family counselling services, clinical services for behaviour management, child care and parent support groups. The database allows counsellors to quickly identify relevant services within the caller's local community.

Counsellors were able to directly assist 57% of Parentline clients without referring them to another agency. Twenty-four percent of counselling sessions resulted in the client being referred to another service for ongoing support.

A further 16% of Parentline clients were referred to their doctor, counsellor, mental health worker or other non-specific referral. In 3% of sessions, counsellors were unable to provide a referral because no appropriate service was available or the client finished the session before a referral was recommended.

Data Collection and Limitations

Parentline counsellors record non-identifying information at the end of every telephone session. There are a maximum of 37 different fields where data may be logged, however, only nine are mandatory (date, time, length of session, state/territory, main concern, problem severity, referral given, whether the Triple P Parenting Program was involved in the call and whether the counsellor made the call to the client).

Ideally, counsellors enter information for each field. However, in reality, the amount of information recorded about each session varies due to the following reasons:

- ✿ Anonymity – Parentline markets itself as a confidential service - frequently clients choose not to reveal details about themselves particularly those that, in their view might lead to identification
- ✿ Sensitivity of information – the nature of some contacts is such that direct information gathering is either contraindicated or proves difficult
- ✿ The length or nature of the call – is such that sometimes even basic data collection is impossible or irrelevant.

Other issues that need to be considered in relation to the data within this report include:

- ✿ Repeat contacts – parents and families are free to use the service as often as they need. Therefore, data reported may include repeat contacts made by individuals across a period of time
- ✿ Multiple problems – many parent's issues are multifaceted, spanning across more than one of the 40 problem types. Counsellors record the one problem type on which most of the counselling time was spent
- ✿ Missing data - Parentline has adopted a policy of recording data in each field in such a way as to identify incomplete or blank responses. All information reported here is therefore based only on those instances for which the field has been completed
- ✿ Statistical significance - all stated data comparisons have been assessed against a 95% confidence interval.



Client Satisfaction

Parentline conducts an annual survey amongst parents and carers from Queensland and the Northern Territory who use the telephone counselling service. The survey measures the effectiveness of Parentline in empowering parents and carers to overcome their concerns, assist with parenting support needs, as well as measure their level of satisfaction with the service. In 2010, 116 parents and carers participated in the survey. The sample group included both male and female callers from a diverse range of ages and cultural backgrounds.

A very high proportion (96%) of clients reported satisfaction with the telephone counselling service, of whom 78% claimed to be 'very satisfied'. This high level of satisfaction is consistent with the proportion of parents and carers expressing satisfaction with the service during 2009 (95% satisfied and 78% very satisfied). In addition, 99% of clients said they would recommend Parentline to a friend, many of whom gave unsolicited feedback that they had already made recommendations.

Clients were also asked to rate the service's effectiveness in relation to its ability to assist clients in specific areas, including: parenting confidence; parenting strategies and skills; understanding children's needs; personal capacity to cope; and improving their relationship with their children. Overall, 100% rated Parentline as 'effective' or 'very effective' at assisting them with at least one of these areas.



Approaching 15 Years of Supporting Parents

Parentline is approaching 15 years of delivering counselling and support to parents, carers and families across Queensland and the Northern Territory. By Parentline's birthday on 28 April 2011, our tertiary qualified, professional **counsellors will have answered more than 150,000 telephone calls from parents and carers** and provided a service that has impacted on approximately 300,000 children.

Additionally, the past 18 months has seen enhancements in our ability to respond to parents varying needs through the introduction of online counselling and also the redevelopment of the website to provide highly accessible parenting information, ideas and strategies.

This milestone offers an opportunity to reflect on our role in supporting parents and families, celebrate our achievements and focus on the new challenges ahead.

Supporting Government Initiatives in Early Childhood Development

Research has confirmed the importance of investment in early childhood development for establishing the foundation of a child's future health, learning and social wellbeing.^{1,2,3,4} Many complex health and social problems such as substance misuse, mental health problems, chronic disease, welfare dependency and criminal behaviour have their origins in early childhood. Prevention and early intervention approaches are cost effective, with long-term benefits for society.

Increasingly, governments are investing in universal prevention and early intervention in relation to children, families and parenting and in parenting initiatives, support and programs. For example, The National Agenda for Early Childhood⁵ highlighted "supporting families and parents in order to strengthen relationships and support for parenting" as a key action area. Objectives included improving access to and uptake of quality support services and parenting programs.

The National Early Childhood Development Strategy⁶ identifies a broad range of objectives that recognise the primary role and influence of families in raising children.

Parentline is well established as a key support service for parents and families in Queensland and the Northern Territory, complementing the face-to-face support services, such as parenting programs, child and community health centres, child and youth mental health services and family relationship centres. Our professional telephone and online counselling and information services provide a unique and specialist role in this network of parenting interventions and support. This specialist role includes:

- ✿ **Accessibility:** parents and carers have direct access to professional counsellors, support and parenting information when they need it and from any location. This supports parents who live in remote areas, have limited access to other services and/or would otherwise not seek help due to barriers of time, cost, knowledge of services or confidence to approach a face-to-face service.
- ✿ **Flexibility and versatility:** matching each family's level of need, counselling sessions are tailored to the parent's and carer's specific situations, build on their strengths and complement their capabilities. Parentline is able to respond to the individual needs of parents through one-off sessions to longer term interventions for complex issues.
- ✿ **Broad scope of assistance:** Parentline provides a service to any family with children from birth to adulthood. It assists a diverse range of clients, some of whom may have limited access to local parenting services.
- ✿ **Connection to other services:** with access to details for more than 8,000 child, youth and family services across the country. Counsellors are able to connect parents and carers with specialist services or face-to-face support when needed. This gives parents a sense of the broad support network they are able to tap into to assist them to care for their children.

Yearly evaluations have demonstrated Parentline's ability to improve parenting capacity, enhance parent-well being and have a positive impact across a broad range of outcomes for both parents and their children. More detail on our evaluation is available on page 19.

Future Challenges

One of the challenges for Parentline is to ensure that policy makers and government consider the valuable role telephone and online services provide to parents, children and families in the entire network of parenting support, parenting interventions and early childhood development. It may be that parent telephone counselling is not well recognised other than for delivering parenting information and referral to other support services. It is important for BoysTown to focus on disseminating findings from evaluations of positive client impact to advocate about the ability of Parentline to deliver specific outcomes for parents and children from birth to teenage years.

6 The National Early Childhood Development Strategy (6) Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009). The national early childhood development strategy - investing in the early years. Accessed May 2011 from http://www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/policy_agenda/pages/earlychildhooddevelopmentstrategy.aspx

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Parentline

1300 30 1300

The service operates
between 8am-10pm,
seven days a week
for the cost
of a local call.

BoysTown
is a company
limited by guarantee.

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